

UPSTAIRS BULLETIN

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An Educational Group

In forcing ourselves through a 40th Summer Course, while it was physically very depleting for us it was an extremely rewarding summer. So in this same vein I shall force myself through to finish Volume 20 of the Upstairs Club Bulletin. Now that libraries and Museums are wanting all the earlier editions which are out of print entirely, there seems to be a reason for writing them. I had always written them for my own pleasure and not for posterity. They did serve a purpose as a history of the school and in keeping some contact with the alumni. Now that the school has closed and most of its students have scattered to the four winds - it remains to be seen how many will remember us at all.

An accident to my left hand, damaging the middle finger, has delayed this issue.

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AUGUST BOURNONVILLE, the great Danish choreographer, wrote - "The dance is an art because it demands vocation, knowledge and ability. It is a fine art because it strives for an ideal, not only a plastic but also in lyrical respects every dancer ought to regard his laborious art as a link in the chain of beauty, as a useful ornament for the stage, and this, in turn, as an important element in the spiritual development of nations."

Bournonville believed that the mission of art, including theatre and dance in particular, was "to intensify thought, to elevate the mind, and to refresh the senses." Bournonville was not "different", but like all great artists, he sought after, and achieved, a universal appeal.

With this in mind, I ask you how many times in going to dance programs can you say this has happened to you. The most recent to come to my mind was the childish and inane sequences called "ballet" on the Lyric Opera stage. What also

comes to my mind is all the good things we have had in the past that the critics have blasted -- now why excuse and let these abominations pass?

In speaking of excellence three young British singers were tops so far this season, namely Idobel Buchanan, Yvonne Minton and Josephine Barstow.

And have you been noticing the quality of the Australian films this past year? If not, make tracks to see them. And whatever else, do not miss seeing Glenda Jackson in "Stevie." These films certainly measure up to Bournonville's standards. We have to go back in the past to speak of Dance attractions that come up to these standards.

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We are more than half way through the first 14-week term in the beautiful and spacious Dance Space studio in the old land mark Building - The Fine Arts Building. The building of many strange sounds from voice and instrumental studios. It brings back the days when we studied with Edna McRae on the 5th Floor - and while at Bolm's, which was at 624 South Michigan Avenue, we occasionally had lunch in the Picadilly Tea Room, then in the Fine Arts Building.

We are averaging 250 Lessons a week in the seven classes that we teach. The classes are beautifully matched with advanced and advanced intermediates thrown in together. Quite a let down from our previous thirty classes a week. The season began with a particularly virulent type of Flu launched in the throat and lungs - very few have escaped it. The School will close December 19th and reopen January 4th. During the interval we hope to go to Key West again to make up for the lost summer vacation.

We have had many visitors during August, September and the fall, from out of the past. Most recently, Dean Diggins, now a professor of

psychology is writing his second book. In Hollywood, Spiro Pastos writes that he has finished his biography of Betty Grable and is looking for a publisher. Elissa Queyquep White was also here, but at the time we could not get together. We had a long conversation on the telephone, however, about her work in dance Therapy - for those who do not know, she is one of the No. 1 therapists in the country.

When Dolores Lipinski returned from New York after a short trip she brought back the news of Edward Caton's death. I first saw Edward dance with the Anna Pavlova Company, in Boise, Idaho in 1925. Three years later I was working with him in the Chicago Civic Opera Ballet. He was our Premier Danseur from 1926 through 1933. He was an unusual dancer in movement comparable to a trapped leopard and in performance unpredictable.

Here at home, we were saddened by the death of Gertrude Gunther Soltkir, who was our Stage Manager for the Federal Theater Ballet performances. She was also Stage Manager for the first performance of my Ballets "Thunder in the Hills" and "That Daring Young Man" at the University of Chicago under the patronage of Senator Paul Douglas.

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THE BEST PART OF ONE'S LIFE - is the working part, the creative part. Believe me, I love to succeed. However, the real spiritual and emotional excitement is in doing.

- Garson Kamin.

The year, 1950, we moved from 119 North Clark (The Historical Grand Theatre) to 185 West Madison, was an active and a very eventful year. I was 47 and Stone was 43 and without question, healthwise, we were both at our peak - otherwise we could not have accomplished all we did during that inspiring and productive year.

A great part of that year Stone was away from the studio on tours with the Page-Stone Ballet and from early April until June, he was either rehearsing in New York or Paris for their "Les Ballets Americains" which was to star Page,

Stone, Jose Limon, Pauline Koner, Lucas Hoving and Betty Jones. Dancers involved from our school were Dorothy Hill, Kenneth Mac Kenzie, William Maloney, James Moore, Joseph Kaminski and Janet Campbell. The success of that venture in dance history has been told, time and again, by Page. Actually, it was a "success de Scandale" because of a cabal against American dancers dancing in France, led by Serge Lifar. Secretly, I always felt that Thomas Fisher, Page's husband, might have instigated the incident for publicity sake - that it did get!

Stone shared in that success as a choreographer of "Frankie and Johnny", but as a dancer he won more acclaim in dancing the part of Johnny and for his dancing in "The Bells", and as Billy Sunday in the Ballet by that name. In their Divertissement "Scrapbook", he danced his always successful dance "Punch Drunk" to original music by Lora Aborn. That number was incredible as an insight into the mind and actions of a bewildered, punch drunk fighter. He and Page also danced their very humorous dance satire - "Zepher and Flora", with its none too subtle combat between a male and female dancer for audience favor. In this section I was represented as choreographer by two dances - one, "Valse Cecile", a dance I had often danced with Janet Campbell and Jeanne Schultz - here danced by Stone and Page. The company also danced by "Set of Three" - in France called "Groupe de Trois". This dance had been on many Stone Camryn programs with many cast changes. In an autographed program brought back to me the most personal one was from Janet Campbell. I read it now with a twinge in my left side - she, the girl-woman, who made such a tragedy of her life and very recently died.

At this time there was always two or more Musicals playing in Chicago. The Grand Theatre (then a movie house) was next door to the Erlanger, where many of the musicals played. "Oklahoma" was there for years and as time went on - along with other theatres we had - "Of Thee I Sing" - "The Great Waltz" - "Lend an Ear" - "Carousal" - "Brigadoon" - "Up in Central Park" - "Sweethearts" - and "High Button Shoes". Each show had large groups of dancers who crowded our small dance space in the Grand. It was romantic to think that the famous Diaghilev Ballet with Nijinski and Bolm danced in the space directly behind our studio mirrors. The Theatre dated back to 1860 after which it went through many transformations -- including the Great

Chicago Fire. It is interesting to note that when we left the Grand our last bill for rent was \$150 and the heat bill was for \$20.30 - from then on these expenses would escalate tremendously.

When Stone was off on tours I was busy at home base with all the classes and an amazing performance schedule. In 1950 I was committed to the St. Paul Civic Opera to bring a group of 16 dancers and choreograph for three performances each of "Aida" and "The Song of Norway" with its beautiful Grieg music. Barbara Steele was the Ballerina and I, her partner. Almost everyone of that group went on into the dance and over half are still in one field or another of the profession.

During the year I revived my Stephen Foster Ballet "Thunder in the Hills" with a new cast. It was first performed in 1939 with Senator Paul Douglas as its sponsor. This was the first year for "Ferdinand the Bull", a children's ballet to the Munroe Leaf story by that name. It was also the first season for the birth of that ever popular Divertissement, "The Bavarian Brawl". This year I danced on two Page-Stone concerts and one of these I danced in Stone's new Ballet to a score by Lora Aborn - "Reunion". I danced in three Ballet Guild programs at the 8th Street Theatre. Janet Campbell and I danced "Valse Cecile" for a U.S. Bond Show for WBKB - one of the earliest TV programs. I also danced two solo programs of my own where I began to hit the stride that went on until 1957 when I danced my 'first' Farewell concert at St. Alphonsus. These solo programs were, as a rule, two hours long with no stage wait longer than two minutes for costume changes. And dancers today think they work hard.

Despite all the performances the classes went on daily and along with them, I had many outside teaching assignments in Rockford, New York City, Washington, Detroit, St. Louis and, we both taught in Boston before opening the school at '185'. All that teaching of so-called Master Classes did for us was to establish our names in the teaching profession. A great deal of mental strain and time went into preparing the notes and the physical expenditure involved in presenting those notes to the conventions made little sense. We soon decided to just devote that time and energy to our own school. As an aside, it is interesting to note that we had both taught all over the United States before we taught for the Chicago Dancing Masters. We were recently elaborately feted by them on our semi-retirement - presenting us with handsome Placques. How typical of Chicago.

Each year had its tragedies and 1950 was one of the most devastating and cruel. The death of Marie Guerrere about destroyed us all. A cancerous tumor on the brain - neglected or refused medical aid by her parents - surgery had been denied. Marie was a lovely gypsy type Italian child, full of zest and love for life and people, began with us as a small child. The parents, battling with each other, had no time for the child. While appearing in the ballet at the Radio City Music Hall, her mind began to fail and it was necessary for her to come home. The day she became of age she came to say goodbye to us. She was leaving for New York to demand the surgery. Her funeral was made a travesty of grief by the hysterical parents.

If that were not bad enough, three of our loveliest children were stricken by severe cases of polio. Billy Alberts and Susan Furlong became wheelchair patients. Billy had the advantage of being taken to President Roosevelt's Warm Springs Foundation - but it was hopeless. Susan recently passed away after living a number of years. Lillian Dea, the third child, ended up with a fused back and is now happily married in California.

The year of 1950 was a year of many unforgettable performances which I mention because of the mental stimulation they gave to our own activities. America's greatest tragic play - "The Death of a Salesman", with Thomas Mitchell, was the top of that season. The movies offered Gloria Swanson in "Sunset Boulevard" and Bette Davis in "All About Eve" - both films were near masterpieces. In the dance we had the glorious Uday Shankar and his delightful Company at Orchestra Hall. In February we had Roland Petit's "Les Ballets de Paris" - in March Ruth St. Denis gave us a taste of her past glory - still later the Sadler Wells Ballet made its initial appearance and was at its best with Moira Shearer in "Sleeping Beauty" - and still in my mind, the model for all time in this old war horse. Mary Skeaping, their Ballet Mistress, taught a guest class for our advanced students. Nora Kaye was at her height this season in "Pillar of Fire". At the Art Institute we had that tremendous Von Gogh exhibit. It seemed impossible that one artist could do so much and yet, years later I visited the Von Gogh Museum in Amsterdam and it was even more incredible. The great musical event of that year was the Myra Hess, all Beethoven, concert at Orchestra Hall. That was the first time I was to hear her and it was the last....and what a grand memory for her audience to cherish. This year I

discovered Gilbert Highet's inspiring book, "The Art of Teaching" which was to mean so much to me in years to come. Also, I found Hermann Hesse this year with "Damien" - an extremely sensitive writer that grew and grew upon me....with many books to come. A new writer that year was Thomas Phillips that I had expected would be a wonder with his novel "The Bittersweet Path". Apparently, he was a one-shot thing -- but what a one-shot story it was. I read it yearly.

After our 9th Summer Course at the Grand and our teaching engagements for the Boston Teachers Society, we moved to the Madison Street address. The lease had been signed July 20th and on August 14th we began the tedious job of making that dirty old Chess Club Quarters into a liveable School (originally, the place was

the WONG HUNG LO restaurant, the owners of which had laid the beautiful mosaic floors and gave it the feeling of a Palace on Madison Street). An army of hard working students made it possible to have the first class on September 17th. The work was by no means completed but the classes went along with the cleaning and repairs. The attendance for our first week was 463. It took fully another year before we were settled ... but it grew and grew and grew, and people became more and more and more attached to that unique place -- hot in summer - cold in winter. Our greatest inducement in pulling out after thirty-one years was not only those 42 stairs but the heat bills that grew and grew and grew. On some of the warmer months this past winter we paid \$500.00 a month. In 1950, even on the coldest months, it had never reached \$110.00.

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